


## BOOK REVIEWS/RECENSIONS

### Pluralist Politics, Relational Worlds: Vulnerability and Care of the Earth

Didier Zúñiga, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2023

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In his book *Pluralist Politics, Relational Worlds*, Didier Zúñiga offers a framework through which to revisit the contributions of John Rawls to the fields of political theory, political philosophy, ethics and democratic practice. While Rawls's work has been widely contested and critiqued, Zúñiga offers a refreshing dialogical perspective of Rawls's concepts of overlapping consensus and pluralism, drawing from Anthony Laden, James Tully, and Alasdair MacIntyre, as well as feminist and disability scholarship. Zúñiga traverses disciplinary boundaries, encouraging the reader to re-examine the artificialness of these boundaries in light of a paradigm shift toward more ecological conceptions of politics.

Zúñiga presents a vision of pluralism incorporating an ecological ethic. His nuanced understanding of vulnerability and (inter)dependency offers some pathways to redefine a shared normative space for deliberation and democratic practice. Where Rawls's thought was constrained by the conditions of economic growth, Zúñiga offers ways to engage in more responsive and reciprocal interactions, grounded in an eco-social understanding of the webs of relations supporting all life on earth.

Vulnerability is demonstrated as a useful first step to ground the co-operative relationships and practices of care necessary for the sustainable well-being of humans, more-than-human beings, ecosystems and the living earth. The concepts of vulnerability and interdependency provide framing for an incisive discussion of the ideals of independence, autonomy and self-sufficiency in liberal politics. The way power is exercised over those who do not fit arbitrary norms of able-bodiedness is scrutinized in light of the limitations of anthropocentrism. Both realist and constructivist accounts of nature are dissected to point to the current limits of political pluralism, one that has detached itself from the earth systems that underlie all sentient existence.

Zúñiga offers an alternative to the “two sciences, two ontologies” perspective by encouraging an ontological monism that enables the politicization of nature, alongside a naturalization of the political. However, he cautions against decentering human agency to the point where it could lose its “normative grip.”

In the context of democratic practice, Zúñiga demonstrates how the theoretical and institutional privileging of consensus problematizes legitimacy. Rawls's conception of liberal legitimacy has been critiqued for denying how prejudice, ignorance or superstition can corrode “reasonable” deliberations. Zúñiga expands this critique and draws a parallel between Rawls's and Hannah Arendt's understanding that the political use of truth claims can corrode democratic practice, preclude debate, and threaten plurality. Instead, Zúñiga opens the possibility of legitimacy achieved through a pluralistic and overlapping understanding, one that does not exclude those who have been historically erased in democratic processes.

The book does, in fact, an excellent job of examining how Rawls's notion of overlapping consensus can be recovered to open up the field of democratic practice to a more ethical, inclusive and reciprocal dialogue between plural worlds. It also offers a strong critique of the

ongoing prevalence of liberalism in the field, often blindingly avoiding the limitations of the ideology—limitations that are increasingly evident in the context of a global climate crisis.

Zúñiga offers up a refreshing perspective on democratic deliberative practices in particular, and his injunction to detach from the dominant liberal frame comes at a welcome time. After the “wave” of deliberative processes in liberal democracies (OECD, 2020), scholars are measuring the limits of these processes. The strong focus on consensus tends to average out necessary minority voices. One of the dilemmas faced by the proponents of deliberative democratic processes is that they are constrained by the frame of liberalism, yet face participants, particularly in citizen assemblies dealing with climate issues, who question these limits and argue for opening the remits of their assemblies to more plural conceptions of the polity.

The operationalization of a relational, reciprocal model of overlapping consensus is not necessarily developed in this book. However, practitioners and scholars can benefit from the reflective space offered through its pages to re-examine their assumptions of the limitations of their practice.

Missing from the dialogue in this book is the work of Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (1993) and particularly Sen’s capability framework, which was also grounded in a critique of Rawls’s *Theory of Justice*, as well as a critique of utilitarianism. Sen’s framework could offer interesting perspectives to the pluralistic framework developed by Zúñiga.

A key throughline in this book is an injunction for scholars and practitioners to consider defragmenting the fields of political theory, political philosophy, democratic practice, and ethics. Engaging in dialogues across disciplines could reinforce the critical self-reflection needed to move beyond instrumental views of sustainability and toward more transformative relationships within a polity that includes more than humans.

## References

- Nussbaum, Martha and Amartya Sen. 1993. *The Quality of Life*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- OECD. 2020. *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave*. <https://doi.org/10.1787/339306da-en>.

## Care Activism: Migrant Domestic Workers, Movement-Building, and Communities of Care

Ethel Tungohan, Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2023, pp. 256

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In *Care Activism*, Tungohan maps out the political landscape that migrant care workers and migrant care activists traverse and inhabit; the book argues that this topography is shaped by factors that include state sovereignty, the specificities of national culture, the influence of nongovernmental organizations and, most importantly, by migrant care workers themselves. It is a comprehensive, academic examination of the activism that migrant workers have performed for other migrant workers, as well as a thoughtful exploration and engagement with the conflicts that can arise between organizations espousing a diversity of beliefs.

Tungohan provides an extensive history of migrant care workers in Canada, which serves to highlight the often tense connections between the past and contemporary demand for migrants who can provide care work, its racialized and gendered nature, and the state’s power to